

The Hagoth Chronicles, Book 1

# The Hagoth Chronicles

## Book 1: Foothold

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## Epitaph

Eber dreaded funerals.

He had seen too much loss in too short a period of time. His father had died while attempting to provision the army two years ago.

Then, shortly afterwards, Captain Teancum was killed in the enemy's camp. Eber didn't know Teancum personally, but every Nephite, and Lamanite knew of him. Several times Teancum had led high-risk stealth attacks upon Lamanite strongholds, letting himself and his men over the walls of enemy cities by night to gain in tactical surprise what they lacked in numbers.

And now in the few months since the war ended, two more great men had died. Helaman, Eber's former commander had died suddenly. Eber had loved him like a father, and still mourned his loss.

But the fourth loss, the death of Captain Moroni, was the hardest of all. Like tearing open an old wound, this funeral threatened to bring the recent loss of the others rushing back to the surface.

Eber gritted his teeth to keep the tears in check, as he watched Hagoth prepare the special boat for this fourth honored leader.

A storm was forming on the horizon. Eber couldn't feel it yet, but his mother had assured him it was coming. They were a people with their backs against the wall, surrounded by enemies and nearly forced into the sea.

Thus it was fitting that at this fourth funeral, the largest

service of its kind in the history of his people, the honored body of the deceased would be surrendered to the sea.

Although this wasn't the first burial at sea among his people, it was by far the most memorable.

Almost the entire nation was streaming in to the region to pay their last respects, with the exception of those positioned to defend the perimeter of their lands. Moroni had been a living legend among his people through all the years he led them in their precarious fight for survival. Now it was time to say goodbye.

Many said it was regret that led Moroni to request burial at sea, like the thousands of Nephite warriors who had died earlier under his command. After the dreadful battle on the banks of the River Sidon, so many lives had been lost that there was no choice but to deliver the dead, both Nephite and Lamanite, to the river's current, to be swept out to sea. Until his dying day, it was said that Moroni regretted not being able to give his men a decent burial. Eber was convinced the ceremony tomorrow was Moroni's final way of reiterating that he considered himself no better than those who fought and died by his side, and that he now considered it a privilege to join them once again.

Moroni had been, and still was, a legend of gigantic proportions. Eber had volunteered to serve in the final enlistment of Ammonite warriors largely because of his towering legend.

The long costly war had been sparked by the Lamanites' hatred for Eber's people. It all started thirty years ago, before Eber was born, when his people were converted through the efforts of Alma the Younger and the sons of Mosiah. As part of that conversion, they changed their

name from Lamanites to Anti-Nephi-Lehites, out of respect for Lehi and Nephi of old. Although they buried their weapons as a covenant with God to stop shedding blood, the blood kept on spilling.

The first blood was their own. Before the Nephites could intervene, an angry Lamanite army suddenly descended upon the Anti-Nephi-Lehites, and slaughtered hundreds of them. All four of Eber's grandparents, and every one of his uncles died that day. They attempted no defense, which stunned the invaders to their core. Eber's aunt had been nine months pregnant at the time with his cousin, and had wept over her slain husband and parents. It was said that her pitiful condition, and similar scenarios playing out across the field of slaughter, added to the change of heart among her attackers, which caused them to lay down their arms, beg forgiveness, and ask to join the people of Ammon. Eber's young father, a reluctant teenager, was one of the Lamanite soldiers converted that day.

It was because of that slaughter that the Nephites invited the Anti-Nephi-Lehites to come take possession of the land of Jershon, so they might be spared. And it was that very act of compassion which infuriated the remaining Lamanites, and led to over a decade of bloody war.

Moroni had been a central pillar of strength throughout that war. Although Eber and the other soldiers had referred to Moroni as General Moroni behind his back, none dared say voice that title to his face. Bristling at pretensions of honor, Moroni insisted on being referred to merely as Captain, even though he was a captain over every other captain in the army. Eber smiled fondly.

"Eber," Hagoth said, "as much as I hate to disturb your

pleasant daydream, time is short."

In mild embarrassment, Eber smiled and stepped forward to assist in the work. Picking up the chisel and hammer where he had left them, he hunched over the rear of the small ship to finish carving the words that all of his people would see as the small vessel carried its honored passenger out to sea. He had been tempted to include the word "General" in this epitaph. However, Hagoth had insisted on something more in respectful keeping with Moroni's teachings. Eber paused to stretch, as he examined the last of the etching.

Stepping back now to examine his finished work, Eber stretched his sore muscles. He could clearly see that Hagoth was right. This simple phrase better exemplified Moroni, and how he should be remembered.

The words simply read: "Our Captain."

## Burial at Sea

Eber and his mother were among the first to arrive at the appointed place for Moroni's funeral.

The site selected for the service was a beautiful clearing, overlooking the sea, where the river flowed out to meet the ocean. Since this site was a good half-day's travel from the closest city, most of the attendees were not expected for several hours yet. But Eber was among the few who had been requested to arrive early. He was to serve in the honor guard.

Eber first took care to find a comfortable vantage point for his mother.

"Eber," she said smiling, "you honor your mother."

"You'll have to blame father," Eber said with a wink. "He taught me well."

The all-too-familiar pain flashed again across his mother's face, and he regretted bringing up his memory, which included the memory of his loss. He reached out his hand to her in an attempt to apologize.

"War scars each of us," she said, examining his visible war scars, as if for the first time. "Some simply heal faster than others."

As if to change the painful subject, they both diverted their gaze to Hagoth down below, who was making final preparations for the small vessel.

From this distance, it appeared that the shipbuilder was giving the small craft its final coat of oil for waterproofing. It was an admirable attention to detail



for a vessel which had such a short purpose.

Hagoth's contribution to the war had been pivotal, but, as he preferred, largely overlooked. His fleet of small coastal boats on both sides of the peninsula had given the Nephites a distinct advantage in transporting men and supplies from place to place. Moroni himself swore those who knew of this tactical advantage to secrecy throughout the war, and beyond, lest the Lamanites learn of it, and use it against them.

One simple ship in the wrong hands would have been enough for the Lamanites to slip beyond Nephite lands by night, and take possession of the lands to the north - a scenario Moroni was unwilling to risk.

In hindsight, shipbuilding was an extremely obvious solution. It was initially hard for Eber to believe the Lamanites wouldn't think of it on their own. Yet, as Hagoth explained, all good suggestions only seem obvious once they've been proven useful.

Eber had clearly been distracted by Hagoth longer than he thought, for when he snapped out of his reverie, he noticed that throngs of people had already arrived.

"Excuse me mother," he said, as he donned his armor, and hurried off to his assigned place.

As he descended towards the water, his thoughts turned to his heritage. He was born in the land of Jershon, a few short years after the Anti-Nephi-Lehites were granted possession of the land.

At the time, his people had offered themselves as slaves to the Nephites, in exchange for the protection offered them. However, the Nephites immediately rejected the offer. Although slavery was common in Lamanite

culture, the concept was abhorrent to every Nephite.

Shortly after entering the land of Jershon, Eber's parents were married by Ammon. Of course Eber wasn't born until some time later, a belated, only child. But his parents cherished him when he finally did arrive. His father named him Eber, after Eber of old, the forefather of Abraham. He had discovered the name while searching the scriptures. That first Eber was one of the early patriarchs, born shortly after the great flood. He was a great-grandson of Noah through Noah's son Shem, the father of the Semitic race. Just as the word Semitic applies to all descendants of Shem, the word Hebrew refers to all descendants of Eber.

Eber was proud of his name, and of his heritage. Before Eber's father had died, he implied that the name was chosen because Eber would help found a new nation. Up to this day, Eber had always assumed that meant the land of Jershon. But that assumption was about to change.

Eber said a silent prayer of gratitude for his heritage, as he took his place in the ceremony.

The other eleven veterans were already glistening in the sun, awaiting him. Eber was by far the youngest veteran of the twelve. He was also the sole representative for Helaman's stripling warriors. Rumor had it he was chosen not just for his valor, but because he was the youngest of the stripling warriors and was nonetheless quite large for his age, as Nephi of old had been.

A hush came over the audience as a large choir rose to sing farewell to Captain Moroni.

The Captain's widow had a seat of honor near the front

of the audience.

The women in the choir were all widows of men who gave their lives during the war. Most of those men had never received a proper burial. So this was a form of closure for them as well. The men in the choir were likewise their comrades, dressed in full battle armor.

Each time the choir sang the refrain, "Farewell dear friend, to memories dear," the tears were as much for others lost in battle as they were for their captain.

After, Shiblon, Helaman's son, rose to offer a prayer of thanksgiving for their families, their religion, and their freedoms, there was barely a dry eye in the group.

Moronihah, the captain's son, then came forward to offer a few words in memory of his father. He spoke of freedom, vigilance, and God's plan in transplanting the Nephites to this portion of the world.

"My father," Moronihah said, "demanded that everything he owned be distributed among those suffering from the effects of the war."

He nodded to Eber's detachment. Taking their cue, they lifted the captain's body and began carrying it down to the shore.

"The only thing my father passed on to me was this sword," Moronihah said, lifting the sword up high for all to see, "in exchange for my promise that I bear it in defense of this people. This I swear."

A trumpet blast erupted from somewhere in the distance. The title of liberty was raised up high, just as the Honor guard reached the river bank, and gently placed the captain in the boat.

With one hand on the craft, the twelve men waded into the river to where the water was almost chest deep.

There, they stood at attention, holding on to the small craft while leaning back against the current. A final trumpet call sounded a triple blast, the signal to form ranks, and they dutifully released their charge to the gentle current. As the river flowed into the sea, the outgoing tide accepted the handoff, and rapidly carried its beloved cargo beyond the first breakers.

Still chest-deep in the river, the honor guard unsheathed their swords, and raised them up high in a final, silent salute.

The tears flowed so freely for Eber, he was no longer sure whether the taste of salt on his lips was from the ocean air. But the tears were not the bitter tears of loss and pain he had feared. Instead, they were tears of gratitude for his heritage - for the privilege of learning from and serving with honorable men like Moroni, Helaman, and his father.

## Cross Currents

After the ceremony, Eber and Hagoth walked up the slope silently to meet with Eber's mother.

As they approached her, she rose and said, "It's clear now. Watching the captain float out to sea, I had a very distinct impression."

Eber and Hagoth exchanged glances.

"We need to follow him," she added.

Hagoth smiled at her, and nodded knowingly. "I felt the same thing," he said.

"Neither of you are making any sense." Eber said. "What do you mean?"

He impatiently pulled an oil cloth from his pack, and began wiping down his wet equipment, awaiting an answer.

"What she means," Hagoth said, "is that it's time for some of us to set off and say farewell to these shores."

Eber was temporarily set back on his heels, stunned by their suggestion to leave this land. This is the land God had led their fathers to discover.

Yet only a moment later, he knew to his core that what they had said was true, not just for them, but for him as well. It resonated from the top of his head to the soles of his feet.

He paused and internalized the implications of that reality for a moment. Then he nodded.

"Father is dead. Helaman, Teancum, and Moroni are dead. There's nothing here for me either."

"It goes beyond having nothing to hold us here," his mother said. "There is a divine purpose in this. I am as certain of that as Lehi was certain of his need to leave Jerusalem. It's time to go elsewhere. I know it."

Her words resonated again in confirmation. Eber knew once again that his mother knew. Eber nodded, "It's time to go elsewhere."

Hagoth turned and looked out to sea. "It is time to go. The question is, where?"

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## **Veleda**

Veleda was one of the first villagers to enter the grove. For some reason, arriving early just seemed like the right thing to do. An emergency council had been called for all of her fellow tribe members in the surrounding region. They were to assemble in this grove by sunset. Such sessions usually meant only one thing: war.

The region of Europe that she and her people occupied was known by some as northern Gaul. Future generations would call the area Belgium. She simply referred to it as home.

Veleda was well respected among her tribe, even though she was shy and only seventeen summers old. Some of that respect was due to her father's position as priest. Some of it was due to her insight and thoughtfulness. The recent announcement of her betrothal to the chief's son only added to her reputation. But unknown to any of them, the events of this day would catapult her reputation to legendary proportions.

She felt the tinge of a familiar sensation at the edge of her consciousness, and paused to bask in it as she admired the forest around her. The feeling was something bordering on love and peace that her father spoke of frequently as coming from God. As she basked in it, her thoughts led to the sea on a distant shore - and in her mind, she saw an extremely large boat approaching, and could almost taste the ocean spray. Somehow, she knew this image was important, without yet understanding what it meant. Her father had the gift of inner vision too, which was unusual. The gift was more common among women. At least among her people.

Her peaceful reflection was shattered when two warriors



rushed into the clearing. One of them was badly wounded. Instantly, she recognized them - they had left on patrol with her fiancée two days earlier. And in that instant her heart froze with the realization that her fiancée was dead. As if to emphasize the point, the wounded warrior collapsed to the ground.

Veleda rushed to the young man's aid, knelt alongside him, and waved off his hovering companion. "Run to the village!" She pointed. "Get help now!"

As he disappeared, Veleda did all she could to keep the young warrior alive. She immediately noticed a deep chest wound. She was well trained to tend minor illnesses and injuries, but this was the gravest wound she had seen. And she knew time was ticking away. She tore off her sleeves, using the fabric to staunch the blood flow as best she could. His pale face was very familiar, but she didn't know his name.

She paused for a moment, looked to the sky, "God of heaven," she pled fervently, "please spare him."

Moments later, the young man's companion appeared with two villagers and the needed supplies. As she wrapped their warm blanket around the young man, his eyes fluttered open for a moment, and he reached for Veleda's arm. Looking into her eyes, he said "boat", and nodded knowingly.

She was stunned. How could he know what she had just seen? He couldn't be referring to the same thing! Or could he? She glanced up at his companion for some hint, but he was already shaking his head, and large tears were welling in his eyes. Without glancing back, she knew that her patient was already gone.

## Inspiration

The next few weeks were full of preparation. Eber's mother quietly put their property and possessions up for sale.

Meanwhile, Hagoth and Eber spent most of their time in Hagoth's workshop, behind closed doors.

After returning home, many veterans who were in on the secret of Hagoth's former shipbuilding came to request help and advice. They reported that they had also received the impression to leave, plus the impression to discuss the issue with Hagoth.

Hagoth thanked them for coming, and kept a careful tally of their names and the number of people in their household. Hagoth simply told them to take their direction from the Lord. He did not yet feel right about revealing his new project.

Up to this point, all of Hagoth's ships had been small craft designed for coastal fishing and local navigation. Building a craft capable of crossing the turbulent, open sea was another matter entirely.

Behind closed doors, Hagoth and Eber spent much time in prayer and contemplation, discussing the type and size of ship that could take them wherever the Lord might lead. They had both felt impressed to include Corianton, son of the late Helaman, in their initial discussions.

But recently, Corianton had delivered copies of the scriptures to their workshop, insisting it was in response to a clear prompting he had received. The scriptures had been copied from the plates to scrolls, and were

handed to them by Corianton in a beautiful leather satchel. Corianton said he was needed elsewhere for the time being, but said he would check in from time to time. Before Corianton left, they requested and received a blessing from his hands.

This morning, Hagoth was hunched over blank wax tablets, writing instrument at the ready. Meanwhile, Eber carefully bookmarked the scripture passages he and Hagoth had been searching for of late: the passages which spoke of divinely-led shipbuilding and ship-navigation.

Eber cleared his throat. "Again, this is from Nephi's account: 'And it came to pass that the Lord spake unto me, saying: Thou shalt construct a ship, after the manner which I shall show thee, that I may carry thy people across these waters.'"

Each time they came across such passages, Eber acknowledged the Lord's wisdom in leading them to speak with Corianton. As far as Eber was concerned, the scriptures from Corianton offered a ray of hope, in what otherwise might be a formidable task.

Eber set that record aside, and pulled another record from the stack. "Now from Noah and his family," Eber said. "The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, the breadth of it fifty cubits, and the height of it thirty cubits."

Setting that record aside, Eber then reached for what was clearly the newest of the records in his stack. "Now from Jared," he said. "And it came to pass that they did travel in the wilderness, and did build barges, in which they did cross many waters, being directed continually by the hand of the Lord."

Although Eber felt a rush of confidence from these passages, he looked up to notice that Hagoth's shoulders were sagging, his neck drooping, his face deep in his hands.

"Hagoth," he said. "What's wrong?"

Hagoth sighed, and looked up. "I'm feeling a bit overwhelmed. I am not a Noah, or a Nephi, or a brother of Jared. They were giants."

Eber quietly admired Hagoth's humility. He thought for a moment, searching and quietly praying for the right words. "Perhaps," Eber began, "those men weren't always the spiritual giants we assume. Perhaps it was through imposing tasks like this that they grew. They each learned to lean upon Heavenly Father for guidance. Perhaps this challenge is our greenhouse for growth."

Hagoth nodded silently. "Eber," he smiled, "you're a good man, and a helpful counselor."

Gathering new courage, Hagoth paused. "It seems like Nephi, Noah, and the brother of Jared, were all shown precisely what to build, and how to build it. But our ship design is still a blank page."

Eber thought for a moment, then reached quickly for Nephi's record again. Checking his bookmarks, he rapidly found the passage that somehow seemed appropriate, although he didn't yet know why.

"Ok, from Nephi again," he said. "'And it came to pass that they did worship the Lord, and did go forth with me: and we did work timbers of curious workmanship. And the Lord did show me from time to time after what manner I should work the timbers of the ship.'"

Hagoth jumped to his feet, and walked over to read the passage for himself.

Using his writing instrument as a pointer, Hagoth carefully scanned through the passage. He nodded repeatedly with a renewed sense of hope. "So a blueprint wasn't handed to Nephi in one grand vision," Hagoth said. "Guidance came to him in bits and pieces." A faraway look came into his eyes as he called upon memory for one of the few passages of Nephi he had committed to memory, "In his own words, 'And I was led by the Spirit, not knowing beforehand the things which I should do.'"

Eber felt a small rush of confirmation, and said a silent prayer of gratitude for the previous impression to turn to that passage. He saw the rekindled hope in Hagoth's eyes.

"But," Hagoth added, "why do we still have a blank blueprint after days of prayer?"

In the same moment, something else clicked with Eber for the first time, and he smiled. He pointed to the passage they had read earlier, and stood up to stand by the tools.

"Notice Nephi's sequence," Eber said. "Notice WHEN those bits and pieces of guidance came to him." Eber shook his head at the simplicity of the principle they had overlooked, waiting for Hagoth to see it too.

Hagoth scanned the passage twice without anything clicking for him. The third time, he looked up mid-passage to notice Eber was now thumbing an axe. Turning back to finish the passage, Hagoth read out loud, "and we did work timbers of curious workmanship. And the Lord did show me from time to time after what

manner I should work the timbers of the ship." He shook his head, eyed the axe, and chuckled. "Nephi's additional inspiration was granted AFTER he showed he was serious about being obedient by first gathering the timber."

"Yes," Eber smiled. "That's something my mother tried to teach me. I guess it's finally starting to sink in."

They paused for a prayer of gratitude.

They gathered the tools they would need, the scriptures, and the writing instruments. Just before putting the copy of Nephi's record into his pack, Eber copied a passage on a scrap of cloth, blew it until it was dry, folded it gently, and put it in his pocket.

They took one last look around the workshop, and grabbed their packs and tools. Stepping outside the workshop, they squinted in the bright sunlight.

The surrounding valley was beautiful farmland, clear cut of old growth years ago. The only trees nearby were small fruit trees, and a few lines of young, thin windbreakers. But none were sufficiently tall for ship timbers. Nor did it make sense to gather ship timbers so far from the water. They both knew where the tallest and sturdiest trees near water could be found. It was time to retrace their steps to the site of the captain's funeral.

They paused briefly to gather water, and to tell Eber's mother where they would be for the next few days. As they cinched their packs, and set out on their journey, Eber carefully pulled the recent note from his pocket, and handed it to Hagoth.

Hagoth read it quietly, just under his breath. "And I,

Nephi, did go unto the mount oft, and I did pray oft unto the Lord; wherefore the Lord showed unto me great things."

Hagoth smiled gently, and nodded, his eyes beginning to mist. Grateful for the reminder, but embarrassed at the need to wipe his eyes, Hagoth mumbled something about his allergies kicking in again.

Eber smiled, and felt a rush of emotion, a brief glimpse of the love God had for the good man at his side. In that moment, it was confirmed to Eber that Hagoth was the man chosen to lead this journey. Eber took up position next to (but a half step behind) Hagoth. Eber closed his eyes, and quietly promised God to support and sustain Hagoth with all his might.

## Shipbuilder

The week passed quickly for Hagoth and Eber. Timber was already stacked up along the shore. Newly-split planks were seasoning in the sun. A large canopy was draped over the rapidly-developing hull, to shield their project from any passing campers or hunters. The length of the hull surprised them both even now, dwarfing anything a Nephite had built in recent generations. But still it was nothing but an empty hull. There was much work yet to do, and many decisions yet to make.

In the midst of one of their breaks, Eber and Hagoth sat on felled timbers near the shore. Like their other breaks, this one had begun, and would end, with prayer.

Hagoth carefully washed and dried his hands, then took hold of the Nephite record.

Eber admired that aspect of Hagoth too. No matter how clean his hands were, Hagoth always washed them carefully, out of respect, before touching the sacred records. Eber hadn't adopted the practice himself, but he greatly admired the sentiment behind it all the same.

Hagoth paused for a moment, and began to read, "'And it came to pass that I, Nephi, did guide the ship, that we sailed again towards the promised land.' We sailed."

Eber picked up a rock and skipped it on the river. "Ok," he said. "We know from this that Nephi's vessel was a sailboat."

"The sail," Hagoth added, "must have hung from the mast Nephi's brothers lashed him to during the storm."

"Since the mast was strong enough to lash and hold a



strong man to it," Eber continued, "that suggests the mast was somewhat thick."

They paused for a moment, eyeballing one of the tall timbers laying nearby.

"A thick mast," Hagoth continued, "suggests a large, heavy sail."

Hagoth frowned. "How do we secure a large mast to the deck?"

"Do we need a deck?" Eber asked. "Do we even need a sail?"

Hagoth smiled. "Thanks for challenging my assumptions again. Ok, let's sift through those two decisions one at a time. Most importantly, why would we need a sail? "

Eber pulled out the wax tablet, ready to write.

Almost to himself, Hagoth continued, "A sail would make for faster travel." He looked up, genuinely asking, "But does speed matter?"

Eber thought for a moment. "A long journey," Eber said, as he began writing quickly on one column of the tablet, "means many meals. So the quicker the trip, the fewer provisions we'd need."

Hagoth nodded, "So in a faster journey, we could use the space saved from needing provisions to carry more families instead."

They both nodded quietly, in anticipation of one of their greatest unspoken concerns. Hagoth's growing tally of families planning an exodus from Nephite lands already numbered in the thousands.

Despite the considerable length of the hull nearby, they both knew thousands would be left behind. But room for an extra family here, an extra family there, made a tremendous difference to Hagoth, and to Eber. It would also make a tremendous difference to those extra families.

In that moment Hagoth knew the answer to his main construction questions. The ship would have a sail, the mast would be fastened to the hull, and the ship would have a deck. Most of the passengers and cargo could sit below deck, inside the hull. That would lower their center of gravity, making the ship more stable in wind and waves. Once again, the more stable the craft, the fewer concerns for tipping or capsizing. And with the extra level provided by the deck, they could carry more families.

Hagoth was not yet interested in bridging the painful reality that they still needed to devise a fair way to decide which families would embark on the ship, and which would not. It was a reality he dreaded.

## The Choosing

As high noon approached, the last of the families arrived at the embankment. Eber was stunned at the number of people assembled - a group almost as large as the one which had gathered weeks earlier for the Captain's funeral.

It was a hopeful, but tense time for everyone. Of course, the younger children had only a small inkling what was at stake. Everyone else was there with a fervent prayer in their heart.

It had been Eber's mother's idea to draw lots to decide who received a seat in the vessel. Of course it took her days to get Eber and Hagoth to first confess what it was that troubled them so much about that suggestion.

It was decided shortly afterwards by Eber and Hagoth, that one ballot would represent each family, to be drawn at random until the places in the ship were all taken.

Hagoth stood, and announced the proposal to the assembled throng. "This is the fairest method we can think of," Hagoth concluded. "Who agrees?"

Eber turned and saw a sea of hands raised in agreement. He and Hagoth breathed a sigh of relief.

The next and lengthiest part of the process then began. A representative from each family was called forward, one at a time, from Hagoth's tally sheet, to examine their lot, and deposit it in the large urn by the shore. Although it took most of the afternoon to complete, Eber's mother had insisted that a hands-on inspection of the lots was the best way to make an honest draw.

Appropriately, last of all, Eber's mother was called

forward, and placed her lot in the urn.

This surprised Eber. After all the inspiration they had received, and after all they had done, he had assumed their seat was reserved. Yet even then, he realized this was right. He looked towards the ship he had helped build with new appreciation, realizing it might end up being his gift to others, instead of his reward.

An impatient hand waved towards the front of the crowd - a teenager.

"Your question?," Hagoth asked.

"Hagoth, I noticed there was no lot for you. Is your seat in the ship guaranteed?" A few grumbles rippled through the audience. Eber was saddened by the concern, after all Hagoth had done for everyone.

"I consider myself a member of Eber's family," Hagoth replied. "I promised his father to watch over them. I intend to keep that promise. I go where they go. If their lot isn't drawn, I'll teach a crew from among those who are selected to sail the ship themselves."

The answer surprised even Eber. Hagoth was an extremely noble man. Nods throughout the audience echoed that sentiment.

The drawing of the lots went smoother than expected. Two blind children from two separate families were invited to take turns drawing the lots, one by one. The urn was turned upside down, dumping the lots onto the beach.

When the first lot was drawn, Hagoth called out the name, and had them come and take a place in the boat. Hagoth knew this part of the process would provide a

sense of closure and finality for everyone.

The most heart-wrenching part of the process came at the end. There were only three seats left unfilled. Eber's lot had not yet been chosen, so he held his breath and said a silent prayer, concluding it with the words, "but either way, thy will be done, not mine."

The last lot was read out loud. A family of two parents, and six children. Eight people for only three spaces. It was the family of one of the blind children drawing the lots. Eber was relieved to note the other blind child was the one that drew the last family's name, and everyone's eyes had seen it. Thus there was no way for anyone to question the process.

Still, a gasp went through the audience as the family struggled with the issue of what to do with the three spaces left on the ship. Their choices were to send three members of their family, or to forfeit those seats to others.

Amid tears, the family decided to send the oldest son to watch over the two youngest children, which included the blind girl.

The sun was setting as Hagoth stepped forward to the podium again. "Each of us has felt the impression to leave. These lots should not weaken our resolve to follow that inspiration. I suggest that those who weren't selected to sail from here, should band together, and find some other way to migrate."

Eber nodded in firm resolve.

## Rebuild

After the lots had been drawn, Eber simply didn't feel like going anywhere. He insisted on staying by the ship, to watch over it.

One by one, the families left. Hagoth had agreed to make sure Eber's mother arrived home safely. Darkness gathered rapidly around Eber. He just sat there, trying to reestablish his equilibrium.

There was no doubt about the initial impression to leave, or the subsequent inspiration throughout the boat-building process. What didn't make sense to Eber was the inspiration for the lots - the process which lost him his seat in the boat. His head said it wasn't right, that it didn't add up, but his heart knew otherwise. Somehow the pieces all fit. The question was, how?

Although an answer was out there somewhere, it felt nowhere within easy reach, and Eber didn't have the heart to pursue it at the moment anyway. It gave him a headache just thinking about it.

His thoughts naturally drifted towards the ship and those who would be sailing away soon. Then it hit him. It didn't matter that this ship was leaving without him. He and Hagoth could simply build another.

Just then, Eber heard a commotion nearby, and reached for the hilt of his sword. He was surprised at how deeply embedded the battle instincts still were.

"Eber," a familiar voice called, "where are you?"

"Mother!" Eber said with a rush of relief. There was no one he wanted to talk with more at this moment than her.

"Eber," his mother said, entering the clearing alongside Hagoth and two other neighbors who had also been left out in the lottery. "We have to talk." Eber smiled. Boy did they need to talk. Based on the timing of their unexpected return, and the excitement in his mother's voice, he suspected they all had the same subject in mind.

"Let's build a fire first," Hagoth said. "It's starting to get chilly."

In moments, they had a blazing fire, and a stew warming in a kettle. It was quickly assembled from the foods they hadn't the heart to eat earlier. As they gathered around the fire, there was an enjoyable buzz of excitement in the cool air

Hagoth asked the neighbor's wife to offer a prayer. As they knelt around that campfire and pled for guidance and help, Eber felt the familiar warmth and comfort that had nothing to do with the fire nearby.

When they arose and took their seats, Hagoth began. "We will continue building boats, Hagoth said, until our lot is drawn."

"The storm season will be here before we could build anew. But next year, we'll have other boats ready."

Eber raised an eyebrow at the task of building multiple ships. "This time," Hagoth said, anticipating Eber's concern, "those who want a lot will have to contribute to the building of the ships. So we'll have plenty of supplies and manpower."

"The one thing we haven't decided yet," Eber's mother added, "is which direction we should go."

"As far as I'm concerned," Eber said, "south is largely out of the question. The Lamanites control all the land southward."

"We don't know for sure how far south the land or their control extends," their neighbor added.

"Although that's true," Hagoth said, "we don't want them to even see our ships passing by. We promised captain Moroni to keep this advantage secret."

"That leaves north," Eber's mother added.

Their neighbor stirred at that suggestion, and quickly reached into his pack. "In that case," he added, pulling a small stone out of his pack "this might prove useful."

He had in his hand small rock fragments. "My son was playing with these the other day. Let me show you what they do." He took the platter he was going to use for the stew, walked to the water's edge, and filled it with water. He picked up a shred of bark on the way back.

He set the platter down carefully near the fire, where all could see, squatted down, and carefully put his narrow strip of bark on the water. Then he took one of the rock fragments and placed it on one end of the floating bark.

Eber watched in confusion, as the floating bark started to turn, and came to stop. Eber shook his head. "I don't follow."

"You will if you want to go north," Hagoth said, chuckling.

With Hagoth's hint, Eber immediately realized that's



where the bark was pointing.

## The First Wave

Eber watched with pride in his work as they loaded the last provisions on the ship. During the last few weeks, Hagoth had taken his handpicked crew out in the ocean, and carefully trained them how to sail, both in calm seas, and in heavy winds. They were also provided with one of the north-seeking rock fragments, to make sure they steered clear of Lamanite lands.

The ship was now fully loaded, and ready to set out. An enormous crowd had gathered for the sendoff.

After prayer, and many goodbyes, the large craft slipped out of the inlet, and sailed northward.

Eber watched with pride as it disappeared in the distance. He could wait another year.

Others however, could not. The recent war had taken its toll on their patience. Rather than trust their luck to a drawing of lots, they had decided to take matters into their own hands, and to head northward on foot.

So as the ship disappeared, those families gathered up their belongings, said their farewells, and set out northward in a long column.

Only a few thousand were left to watch and wave. Eber knew some of the company leaders, and waved a final farewell. He could still hear their livestock bleating long after they marched out of sight.

A few critics had come for the sendoff as well. They put a bad taste in Eber's mouth. They had accused the emigrants of cowardice. Of turning their backs on their people, and defecting.

Their tone alone was enough to bother Eber. But their hypocrisy angered him further. None of them had served in the recent war, while almost every one of the departing families had been represented on the battlefield.

Eber didn't waste his energy trying to explain to the critics that God's hand was in this emigration.

He simply walked away, reflecting on how often God had led His people from place to place.

Abraham. Moses. Lehi. The list went on and on. There was a divine purpose in this exodus. But how that purpose would unfold, is what Eber pondered day and night.

## The Council

By sunset, the previously peaceful grove was abuzz with activity. Most of the local villagers were there, and delegates from surrounding villages had also arrived. In the distance, the sound of blacksmiths hammering furiously could be heard. They had heard the rumors of invasion, and were preparing for the council's decision, which was certain to call for war.

In the center of the commotion, Veleda's father and the local chief were talking hurriedly with the surviving patrol soldier, and with a fourth man Veleda couldn't recognize. The soldier was repeatedly pointing towards the south, showing a sweeping arc with his arm, and the fourth man was nodding grimly. Veleda couldn't hear their words, and for the moment, preferred to keep it that way. She already knew everything she needed to know. There would be time to grieve later.

Suddenly, a horn sounded, the call for assembly to begin. Like all the others, Veleda quickly found a place on a log bench.

Her father-in-law, clearly showing signs of grieving, walked to the center of the assembly, as the crowd hushed.

"Friends and neighbors", he said, "the rumors are true. A powerful army is approaching from the south. Our homes are in danger." He paused for effect, as his words spread like electricity through the assembly.

Then he raised his hand to quiet the murmur, and continued. "We have two choices before us. We can fight. Or we can negotiate."

A man rose near the front of the assembly and asked the question on everyone's mind, "How strong are the invaders?"

The chieftain nodded, and took a step backwards, and motioned the patrol scout to step forward and speak.

The soldier paused for a moment, before unleashing his words. "They're not the largest force I've ever seen. But I have never seen an army better equipped, or better organized."

Shouts of cowardice and encouragements of honor erupted from various places. In the midst of that buzz, a woman arose. "Who are they? What do they want from us? And can we reason with them?"

Few men would have asked the last question. Invasion elicits a natural response among men – to simply push back with force and

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bravado. But most of the women in the assembly had no desire to see husbands and sons die rashly, and nodded at the wisdom in her questions.

The chieftain motioned this time to the stranger he had been speaking with earlier. The stranger stepped forward, and began to speak in a dialect that was initially difficult for many to understand.

"My name is Vektorix," he said slowly, trying to allow his listeners time to adjust to his accent. "I am a fellow Belgic tribesman. I was born among the Remi, a day's ride to the south." He motioned in that direction.

Veleda nodded. Her tribe traded with the Remi regularly.

The visitor continued, "Four days ago, our scouts reported that the Romans, who wintered to the south last year, picked up camp and were advancing north into our territory. We attempted to negotiate, but were told that if we didn't surrender unconditionally, we would be destroyed." Most of us submitted and surrendered hostages. Those few who resisted were killed, and their families were enslaved."

He paused for a moment, and then added, "I have come to warn you that they are on their way here. Roman advance scouts have already penetrated your borders. The bulk of their army is only a few steps behind."

A cry of "never surrender!" erupted from the back of the crowd, near Veleda. And the assembly descended into chaos. Many shouted for their weapons. Others urged for submission.

The chieftain paused for a moment, allowing the emotions to reach a near crescendo. At just the right moment, he motioned for the horn to sound. And as its cry pierced the babble, the assembly hushed, and the last of the sun's rays disappeared.

"It is time for a decision," he said. "We have two choices. Submit or fight."

Veleda found herself rising immediately to her feet and shouting, "We have a third choice." She was as stunned by her own outburst as anyone else. And all eyes turned to her.

Her previous vision of a seafaring people flashed across her mind. "We can leave."

## The Return

The year had passed quickly for Eber. He had kept busy as foreman of the original shipyard, overseeing the other men. They had completed three ships in short order, somewhat smaller than the ship that had sailed the previous year.

Meanwhile, Hagoth had spent much of his time at the new shipyard on the south sea, since some had felt impressed to sail westward into that sea. Hagoth had agreed to help them build, in exchange for their promise to stay out of sight of Lamanite lands.

Not every family had been able to contribute able-bodied men, since so many had been lost during the war. But the women and children of such families provided food, supplies, and encouragement to the men, more than carrying their weight.

The biggest thrill of the year had been a few days back, when the original ship returned, empty except for the original crew. The news of a successful new colony planted in the north spread like a shockwave throughout all of Nephite society. This crew said they returned out of gratitude to Hagoth.

Thus when the lots were later drawn, it was only fitting that Eber's family were selected to sail on the original ship, joined of course by Hagoth. Eber was also relieved that the lot for the family of last year's blind girl was selected again, allowing them to join their three children.

Now that the day to leave had finally arrived, Eber and his mother could barely contain their excitement. Or their gratitude. They both wept openly during their final prayer on Nephite soil.

It was a beautiful day, with a perfect northwest breeze. Their ship took the lead of the small armada, as they waved farewell to the land of Bountiful. Even as they pulled away, they could see the new column forming up to march north.

Eber turned to look ahead at the open ocean. "This is how Nephi must have felt," Eber said, somewhat under his breath.

Their initial voyage took longer than Eber expected. But when they finally arrived at the new colony, Eber was deeply impressed at how much had been accomplished there in one short year. Homes and stockades had been built. A new lush crop was maturing.

Eber felt an immense sense of satisfaction that his efforts had played a role in transplanting these good people in a fruitful land, far from the Lamanites.

Of course the old colonists were thrilled to see Hagoth, and especially the crew they had sent back in order to retrieve him.

At the meeting that night, however, Hagoth thanked them for their kindness, but announced that he would not be staying. "The Lord has different purposes for each of us," he said. "I need to continue on."

The subsequent discussion between Eber and Gamara was brief. They simply nodded and said they would follow Hagoth.

The following morning, after replenishing their provisions, Hagoth, Eber, and those who chose to remain with them, waved farewell as they sailed away, knowing they would likely never see another Nephite

again.

This portion of the voyage was much more comfortable, since the boat was only about two-thirds full. Many had decided to stay at the first colony. Still, they were a sizeable company. Not counting the women and children, they made for a sizeable force. Hagoth had insisted that each man bring their weapons, just in case.

"The Lord has different purposes for each of us," Eber thought out loud to himself, remembering Hagoth's words from last night. The colony that was vanishing on the horizon was clearly the first part of the Lord's purpose with Hagoth and Eber. Eber likewise wondered what would become of the ships Hagoth had built on the south sea.

But the unknown purpose the Lord still had in store for them filled Eber with a rush of anticipation.

As the shoreline vanished in the distance, Eber's mother reached for the scriptures, and read the following passage:

"And it came to pass that on the morrow, after we had prepared all things, much fruits and meat from the wilderness, and honey in abundance, and provisions according to that which the Lord had commanded us, we did go down into the ship with all our loading and our seeds, and whatsoever thing we had brought with us, every one according to his age; wherefore, we did all go down into the ship, with our wives and our children."

Eber's thoughts of Nephi were interrupted when his mother leaned towards him and whispered, "With our wives and our children... Hmm. Don't you think something's missing?"



Eber rolled his eyes, and said, "Don't rush things mother." But then he noticed that his mother was smiling past him, instead of at him.

He turned and noticed for the first time, a pretty young woman who had apparently joined them from the colony. She quickly averted her eyes.

He had been so busy getting the boat ready he hadn't noticed her until now.

"She left her parents behind", his mother said. "When Hagoth announced he would be moving on, she said she belonged with us."

"The funny thing is," Hagoth intruded, "she was looking at you when she said it."

Eber blushed beet red, as they laughed gently. "This is going to be a long voyage," he thought to himself.

But then he glanced at the pretty young woman again. There was a tear in her eye, and a determined look on her gentle face, as she looked back in the direction of the colony they left behind. He wanted to approach and offer some words of consolation, but he felt as immovable as the mast. He was skilled with the sword. And he was an excellent craftsman. But when it came to matters of the heart, he was all thumbs.

## The Voyage

Shortly after the last glimpse of land vanished to their left, Hagoth set a northward course. Eber was surprised to notice the ship accelerating rapidly.

He looked up to see the sails taut and full. Something had clearly changed with the course correction.

To get a better viewpoint of what was happening, Eber quickly hoisted himself up to the top of the mast. He was stunned by what he saw. From up high, Eber could see they were in the middle of a flowing blue river, running through the surrounding ocean and heading northward. The current was of a clearly different shade of blue than the surrounding water. Eber could even make out the distinct edges of the current, on either side of the ship. He pondered the panorama for a moment, and then hurriedly rappelled back down.

Of course he immediately reported to Hagoth. Then, reaching for Nephi's record, Eber searched for the passage that came to mind. In moments, he found it, a statement by Jacob, the brother of Nephi.

Eber read in a soft voice, "...But we have been led to a better land, for the Lord has made the sea our path...."

"Our path," Eber nodded, pondering the blue current they were riding. It reminded him of something else Jacob had recorded. But just then, he realized he wasn't alone in his thoughts.

"What path?" the pretty young woman asked.

"What did you see up there?" asked Hagoth, who was also listening intently, but Eber ignored the teasing grin on his face.

Eber smiled, grateful for the opportunity to share what he had seen. "Well, the law of witnesses requires a confirming testimony." He pointed upward to the girl, and grinned, "Are you afraid of heights?"

"I'm a better tree climber than any of my brothers," she smiled back. He was almost disappointed. It would have been more fun to tease. Still, he smiled as he quickly put together a makeshift sling, fastened it to the mast rope, and helped her get seated. In the process, he learned that her name was Sarah.

Sarah wasn't yet hoisted up to the top of the mast before she began to giggle.

Eber smiled, knowing the reason for her laughter, without having to look up. By now, most of the company were quite accustomed to the rocking of the boat at sea level. However, up near the top of the ship's mast, that gentle rocking motion was amplified considerably, making for an experience somewhere on the border of fun and terrifying.

As Sarah reached the top of the mast, however, and could look out over the top of the sail, her giggling stopped instantly. "It's beautiful!" she gasped. "It's like a road, marking our way." Sarah looked down, and Eber couldn't help but grin back, as she giggled once more. It was a memory-making moment for the both of them. A solid foundation for a new friendship.

By the time she was lowered down, everyone had huddled nearby, anxious to hear and see more. Most of the young and middle-aged took a turn at being hoisted up. Sarah helped each of them into the sling. Eber's mother was the only one of the elderly to venture. Each came down with a renewed resolve that the Lord had a

purpose for this company, and that He was leading them through Hagoth.

But that resolve was tested a few days later.

They had entered a vast fog bank. The bark and rock fragment device was brought out, and it showed their course had changed more eastward. Hagoth nodded knowingly, yet continued his course.

The grumbling began almost instantly. Some complained that east took them further away from the lands they had left. Others complained that they had the device for a reason, and that it was folly to ignore the device's direction. The words "Liahona" and "Laman" were whispered repeatedly.

Eber watched for the right moment to speak up.

Before he could, Hagoth called an impromptu meeting. Dressed in full battle array, with shield, helmet, breastplate, and sword, Hagoth reminded them that they had not selected a device to lead them, but they had instead selected him.

Eber then shook his head in admiration that Hagoth was walking in circles around the device. Few on board had enough experience with the new device to know it was drawn to metal. Eber and Hagoth, however, were well aware of that principle.

Hagoth of course revealed no hint of humor. This was serious business. Each time Hagoth brushed by the device during his speech. Eber watched as the shockwave rippled through the company. The device was no longer pointing in a single direction. It was instead turning to point to wherever Hagoth moved.

The only thing more dramatic would have been if a ray of light had burst through the fog and shone down upon Hagoth's face as he spoke. At this point, however, that wasn't necessary.

"I never said I would take you due north," Hagoth concluded. "But I promise you I will take you where the Lord leads. This is my ship. You can follow willingly, or you can swim," he concluded, with his hand on the hilt of his sword.

Eber immediately leapt to his feet, and shouted "Amen." Scores of others did likewise. That was the end of the rumblings on ship over the issue of leadership.

To keep it that way, from that point on, Hagoth and Eber's mother were the only ones allowed to use the device. For too many others, it was too easy to confuse a reference point with an inspired leader.

## Storm

More than once during their travels, excitement erupted on board when land was sighted. Everyone was sore and tired from the voyage, provisions were getting low, and everyone was anxious to set foot on land. However Hagoth simply shook his head, and pointed forward.

The monotony ended one night shortly after passing one of those potential landfalls. A storm arose, unlike anything they had experienced in their voyage. Lightning repeatedly lit up the sky, and thunder boomed across the ocean. The wind quickly picked up, and began howling so fiercely that Hagoth had a difficult time keeping his ship from tipping.

The waves also grew around them, at times looming overhead like mountains. The ship, which had seemed so large earlier, was now tossed about like a little toy.

No one on board had ever experienced anything like this, and most everyone was terrified. Gambara mentioned the storm during Nephi's voyage, when most thought they would be swallowed by the sea. Hagoth tried to reassure the others, however they were all tossed about in the boat as ruthlessly as the ship was tossed about in the sea. Most retreated below deck. Fear was in most everyone's eyes.

Sarah, however, who was still on deck, said, "I think we should have a prayer." Not everyone could hear her over the wind, waves, creaking of the boat, and the thunder, but those who could immediately nodded in agreement.

However, just at that moment, the ship was hit sideways

by a tremendous wave, and was awash in water. Eber and the others quickly grabbed onto the ship's rigging to keep from being washed overboard. But Sarah wasn't strong enough, and was swept out to sea as the ship righted himself.

Eber heard her scream "Eber!" just before she was engulfed by another wave. And his heart sank.

Hagoth attempted to turn the ship about, but had difficulty fighting the waves.

Impatient, Eber quickly jumped to his feet, pulled out his knife, and cut a small barrel free from it's lashing. With the barrel under one arm, he ran full speed to the back of the boat, jumped into the seething Irreantum, and set out frantically in Sarah's direction. "Father in Heaven," he said between gasps of breath, "please keep her afloat until I can reach her. Help me find her."

In that moment, he heard a cry from the boat. One of the brave passengers had apparently been hoisted up to the top of the mast to assist the search. Despite being tossed about like a rag doll, the passenger was pointing the way Eber needed to swim.

With a prayer of thanks for the direction, Eber fought off fatigue as he battled the wind and the waves, with little thought for how quickly the ship was vanishing in the distance.

"Sarah!" he yelled at the top of his lungs. "Sarah!"

Finally, as he rode the crest of the next mountainous wave, he caught his first glimpse of her. She was clearly losing the battle, and was about to go under. More specifically, she was about to be buried by the mountainous wave he was riding.

"Hold on! I'm almost there." He yelled. She looked up to see his mountain come crushing down on her. But she was too tired to scream, and slipped silently and exhausted into the deep.

As the wave troughed, Eber took a deep breath, let go of his barrel, and descended into the frigid deep, kicking with all his might, and reaching out frantically for Sarah. Just when he thought his lungs would burst, he felt her arm. And his heart almost burst with gratitude.

Grabbing tight, and kicking upwards with the last of his strength, they broke the surface. He was completely exhausted. The ship was nowhere in sight. And Sarah was limp and lifeless.

"Father," Eber croaked, "please don't let it end like this."

In that moment, Eber's little barrel appeared within reach, and with a cry of gratitude, Eber reached out and tucked it under one arm, while he held onto Sarah with the other. It was just enough buoyancy to keep them both afloat.

"Thank you Father." Eber said silently. "Please let her live."

As he scanned the sea for the ship and for some sense of direction, Eber realized he was completely lost and turned about.

The water was so cold that Eber was quickly becoming numb in his legs. And that numbness was slowly rising up to his chest and arms. Little did he know that the cold which was killing him was keeping Sarah within reach of life.



As the numbness moved upward into his chest and arms, Eber began to loose his grip on Sarah and the barrel. Just before slipping into the water, he whispered, "Father, thy will be done."

## Promised Land

Eber awoke coughing in the warm sunlight. Cheers emerged around him.

Not taking a moment to realize where he was, he croaked out, "Sarah! Where's Sarah?!"

"Eber, I'm here." A hand touched his. And Eber wept.

As his eyes adjusted, he saw her smile weakly at him. She was wrapped in blankets nearby. Then he took in the surrounding sight. He was on the deck of the ship. The sail was in tatters. But the other passengers were gathered around smiling. After days of monotony at sea, the recent drama, with its love story, invigorated and cheered everyone on board.

Eber then thought of the others and asked, "Did everyone survive?"

"No," Gambara said. "Joseph and his wife were washed overboard too. We couldn't find them. We're grateful to have found you." Eber's eyes immediately scanned the passengers for Joseph's little boy, who slept quietly in the curve of a shield, on a pillow of grain. Following his gaze, Sarah squeezed Eber's hand.

Gambara added, "The scriptures were washed overboard and lost as well." And the group mourned silent for some time.

Later that day, the ship was restored to order, and Hagoth unexpectedly changed their course to the south east. That same day, Hagoth married Eber and Sarah. The passengers erupted in cheers. At the close of the

ceremony, Eber and Sarah announced their decision to raise Joseph's little boy as their own.

Later that evening, land rapidly appeared on the horizon. As they approached the mouth of a great river, Hagoth sighed and said, "This is the place." Eber held Sarah and their little boy close. Looking at her new husband and the precious little boy in her arms, Sarah whispered, "Yes, it is."

Like many of the others, Eber's mother had memorized a few favorite passages. Since the storm, they had quickly been writing down what they remembered of the scriptures, and it was surprising how much of their record they could recall. So, all was not lost in the storm.

The ship came to a rest in the harbor at the mouth of a great river just after sunset. That evening, as they made final preparations to scout out the land, Gambara offered the following memorized scripture to her shipmates: "And it came to pass that after we had sailed for the space of many days we did arrive at the promised land; and we went forth upon the land, and did pitch our tents; and we did call it the promised land."

## Foothold

There was excitement on the ship the following morning as a band of their men armed themselves and prepared to explore the land. They could see wafts of smoke in various directions, suggesting some sort of habitation nearby. They each wondered about the type of people they might encounter here.

"The Israelites," Hagoth said, "took their land by force. The Nephites, however gained their land by other means, as the Lord directed. Such may be the case for us."

Eber was appointed to take charge of the company on board, while the search party set out to explore the new land.

While the expedition was gone, excitement reached a peak aboard the ship. However, shortly before sunset, the search party returned with troubling news.

The land was occupied by a strong and territorial people whose language they could not understand. Through hand gestures, tone of voice, and facial expression, they clearly made it known that the newcomers were welcome to trade, but would not be allowed to settle nearby.

Hagoth's resolve was unruffled. "The Lord will open up a way," he said.

While they waited the next few weeks for the promised opening, the men traded with the locals to replenish their food supplies. Fishing was also plentiful.

Summer would be ending soon, however, and the items they had available to trade were running low. Without a

place to shelter themselves during the cold months approaching, the colony would not survive their first winter.

So one morning, after prayer, Eber set off adorned in his finest possessions. His neck ring and gold arm rings glistened in the sun as he waded to shore. Sarah and the others watched anxiously from the ship.

Just out of sight of the ship, a man came into view, clearly interested in Eber's gold. Through hand gestures, Eber made it clear he would trade his items in exchange for whatever the man deemed fair.

In derision, however, the man simply pointed to a bank of dirt nearby, eyebrow raised. Eber paused for a moment, and then smiled and nodded. He filled his spare cloak with the rich soil, and surrendered his gold. The other man laughed out loud and shook his head as he walked away, admiring his cheaply-bought gold.

Upon his return to the ship, Eber was received with disapproval there too. The people were stunned that he would trade his wealth for dirt. Hagoth simply smiled, as if in relief.

"Autumn is approaching," Eber said. "Simply follow me, and you'll see that it was wealth well spent."

Landing on the opposite bank of the river the following morning, Eber led an expedition to a choice plot of land, lugging his cloak full of soil on his broad shoulder. There, the people watched in amazement as Eber brazenly spread out his new purchase as thinly as he could across the land. Of course in most places, it was impossible to tell his sprinkled soil from the preexisting soil. But that of course was precisely Eber's intent.

"I purchased my soil fairly," Eber smiled, "so I will use it any way I choose." To emphasize the point, he even planted a few precious seeds as the beginning of a late garden.

It was the planting of a new colony. But the storm that was gathering threatened them all.

## Title of Liberty

Of course when the man who sold a cloak full of dirt in exchange for gold returned to his people, he was praised for his shrewdness, and the newcomers were mocked as fools.

But the mood shifted drastically days later when news arrived of what the newcomers had done with their soil. The dirt seller was quickly vilified among his people as the real fool. A council of the old settlers was convened, and a course of action was resolved.

That afternoon, Eber was exploring along the banks of the river for good hunting and fishing grounds. A man emerged into view on the opposite bank. Anger was clearly on his face.

The man pointed to the sun in the sky. Then he motioned with his finger where the sun would set that night, and where it would rise the next morning. Eber nodded his head, acknowledging that he understood the man was speaking about tomorrow.

Darkness then shadowed the man's face, as he pointed to Eber and beyond, and slid his finger slowly across his neck. The man then spit into the river, turned around, and walked away.

His message was clear. Their colony would be assaulted tomorrow.

Eber immediately reported the news to Hagoth, and a council was rapidly convened. As soon as the threat was announced, the meeting erupted into panic. Eber could almost taste the fear.

One woman stood to speak as Hagoth pointed to her

raised hand. Like Eber's mother, she was an Anti-Nephi-Lehite. She sighed, frowned at the battle gear on display, and said, "I thought we left bloodshed behind us. I thought that's why we left."

"We still can," a man from the back shouted, not waiting to be acknowledged. "We still have the ship. I say we leave here tonight."

Hagoth stepped back and stood next to Eber, watching the fears escalate. They each awaited the right moment to intercede.

A man near Eber stood and shouted "I say we get back on the ship, and sail to a more peaceful place."

The implications of that suggestion reverberated throughout the group,

"There is no such place," Eber said, stepping out of the shadows. He was in full battle array. "And even if such a perfect place did exist, it would soon be tarnished by divisions like this. Lehi's children have never been the exception."

His admonishment cut to the heart. The stage was set. "I await the counsel of the leader God has provided." The room was deadly silent.

Eber quickly stepped aside, as Hagoth slowly stepped forward.

In his hand was a pole. Even before he unfurled the banner, every man, woman, and child knew what it was. A copy of their banner of liberty. It was first raised twenty-three years earlier, by the Captain himself. And all who refused to flock to it had been considered traitors.



"I have become an old man," Hagoth said, a storm brewing underneath his graying eyebrows. "But until now," he thundered, "I have never once seen a Nephite turn and flee."

"Why would you now try to convince me to do something I never learned before? I can fight. But I can not flee. Since my life will end soon, one way or the other, then at least let me council with the people who are dearest to me."

"Our forefathers preferred to die than surrender. I refuse to surrender to fear."

"Those who have determined to kill us and toss our bodies into the sea are right now sleeping peacefully, if I may use the word, to awake fresh and rested for our slaughter tomorrow. This is premeditated murder, pure and simple. And we know the punishment for that crime."

"Death," one man said silently.

"I hereby decree their lives forfeit," Hagoth said, lifting the banner up high. "We have as much right to this unoccupied land as anyone. Our cause is just."

"They hold us in such disdain," Hagoth said, and then paused for a long moment, looking off into the distance. Then he started again, speaking swiftly, "that they sleep without watchmen. Let us fall upon them this night, and victory will be ours."

Rumblings erupted among the people. The fearful wavered in the face of his certainty. But how could he know the condition of the other camp?

As if responding to their unvoiced question, he continued, "Follow me to defend our freedoms, and if the enemy camp is not as I have said, I offer you my graying head in exchange. Then you may flee as you wish."

Moments later, an imposing force of their people was assembled, armed to the teeth. Eber's men were also equipped with ropes and nets. The doubters were asked to step out of formation, and sent back to guard the women.

When they arrived at the enemy camp, spies were boosted to the top of the wall. They signaled back that all was as Hagoth had promised. Using ropes and nets, the army silently let themselves down over the walls, with Hagoth in the lead. In that moment, Nephite history echoed in the minds and hearts of every soldier. This was an echo of Teancum's strategy, last used by him against the Lamanites six years ago.

Once in position, Hagoth gave a night-rending battle cry, and swords were unleashed upon the camp. Many inhabitants fled for cover, including their chieftain and his wife. Others stood to make a hasty stand, but were quickly cut down. Numerous pockets of resistance rose up and were crushed throughout the night.

The final skirmish ended as the sun began to light the horizon.

Those that surrendered their weapons and promised never to fight them again, were allowed to leave.

As silence descended upon the encampment, Hagoth signaled for the men to reassemble into their companies. To the astonishment of every soldier except perhaps Eber and Hagoth, every man was found to be standing

in his place. Despite their wounds, not a life had been lost.

Eber's memories as a stripling warrior rushed to the forefront, and he shed a tear in gratitude.

As the sun rose that morning, the title of liberty was erected over the eastern gate of the encampment. An altar was also erected, with special care given to ensure none of the altar stones had been worked by the hand of man.

For three days and three nights, the colonists held a victory memorial, in gratitude to Hagoth, and especially to the God of Abraham, for leading them to a new land, and for preserving their lives and their liberty.

It was a time of solemn gratitude, as they buried the bodies of the enemy, and attended to the needs of the camp's orphans. Many chose to raise those children as their own.

That three-day memorial that would be passed down from father to son for centuries. And from that day forward, the surrounding peoples were terrified of the fierce newcomers.

However to fulfill the Lord's purposes, their origins as a people would one day be forgotten.

Until a distant day, when the grafting would come full circle.

## Prologue

This ends the first book of The Hagoth Chronicles. Watch for Book 2 to be released soon.

As a glimpse of Book 2, the following prologue is provided, the opening chapter of Book 2.

## Opening Chapter of The Hagoth Chronicles, Book 2

With heaviness in her heart, Veleda pulled back gently on the reins. She called her horse Lightning, and he lived up to his name. He slowed to a canter, as they cleared the final rise. Veleda, pulled the reins gently against his neck to turn them about, and then brought them to a stop. This would be her final look back.

From this distance, Veleda could barely make out the preparations for war on a distant hill to the south. The Romans were hurrying to dig out an encampment and raise the sod walls as nightfall approached. They were more numerous than she had expected.

Only then did she let the tears begin to flow. Since the previous night, she had pled with her people to flee north for safety. In the end, even her father considered her a coward. She wanted to pity herself for his rejection, but her heart was heaviest for what was about to befall her people.

Just after Veleda wiped her eyes, she noticed movement on the Roman flank. In a bold rush, her people emerged from the tree line to attack the Roman encampment.

The Romans were caught completely off guard by the speed of the attack. Those who had been laboring to build the encampment had previously removed breastplates and helmets. Otherwise vulnerable, they barely had time to grab their swords and shields in time to brace for the blow.

With surprise on their side, Veleda's people began driving a quick wedge through the defensive line. In response, the rest of the Roman line began to waver and crumble. And it looked for a moment as if her people might win the day after all.

But then the dreadful tide turned. Roman commanders dug in. Their reinforcements arrived and leapt into the front lines in full battle attire. And trumpets provided a blast of courage.

Moments later, Veleda's people were fleeing like scattered mice. In response, the Roman cavalry units swept in to cut down their retreat. And Veleda's tears began to flow again.

For comfort, she reached into her satchel, and felt the sacred object there. It was a record her father had received in trading with the Remi years earlier, which he had given to Veleda as a wedding gift. It was

## The Hagoth Chronicles, Book 1

said to be sacred, although none of their people could read its strange writings. Other than food and her horse, it was the only possession she took time to pack.

As the battle, or more accurately the rout, spread to the tree line, Veleda mournfully turned Lightning about, and gave him a gentle squeeze with her knees to urge him northward.

Part of her wanted to return to attempt to aid the wounded and the fatherless. But they had chosen their fate. She could not risk returning now. For Roman troops would be on the prowl for new slaves. She wept for their loss, and for own. And although her heart ached as never before, she never looked back, but quietly rode northward into the growing darkness.

## The Hagoth Chronicles, Book 1

Approximately sixty years before Christ, just after a devastating war with the Lamanites, scores of Nephite colonists boarded Hagoth's largest ship, and sailed northward out of Nephite history.

This account suggests a possible, though fictional, history for some of those colonists, based on research from the non-fiction book, *Nephites in Europe*.